# *Why Britain is at War*

## THE CAUSES AND THE ISSUES

*Set out, in brief form, from the Diplomatic Correspondence and Speeches of Ministers*

BY

SIR EDWARD COOK

*ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTH THOUSAND*

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# PREFATORY NOTE

This pamphlet was prepared primarily for circulation by the Victoria League, which proposes through its organisation and allied Associations both at home and in the Dominions to distribute information, by lectures, pamphlets and leaflets, in the way of simple statements about the causes which led to the War and the issues which are involved. The pamphlet is placed on sale to the general public with the idea that it may possibly be found useful by others than those whom the Victoria League hopes to reach.

The immediate causes of the war and of Britain's intervention in it are not as yet fully recognised in some quarters. They are clearly set forth in the White Paper of "Correspondence respecting the European Crisis." This Paper ("Miscellaneous—No. 6, 1914") should be in the hands of everyone who has time to master it; it may be obtained through any bookseller, price 9d. The speeches of the Prime Minister and of the Foreign Secretary in Parliament are only fully intelligible in the light of the Diplomatic Correspondence. To the arresting nature of the Correspondence a striking testimony may be mentioned. In the Canadian House of Commons both



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Sir Robert Borden and Sir Wilfrid Laurier expressed their belief in the justice of Britain's cause, and Sir Robert Borden "added that, after reading the White Paper he was convinced no Government ever made a more whole-hearted attempt to keep the peace" (*Times*, Aug. 21).

Not everyone, however, has the time to read, or the habit of easily digesting, a White Paper containing more than 150 documents. In the following pages an attempt is made to put together, in a readily intelligible form, the main points in the diplomatic Correspondence and in the speeches of Ministers. The extracts from the White Paper are given by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. A few simple explanations are added, and some quotations supplied from other official sources.

In the present edition I have included (p. 23) some passages from the remarkable "Dispatch from the British Ambassador at Berlin respecting the rupture of diplomatic relations with the German Government"; and also (p. 12) a reference to the hardly less remarkable "Dispatch from His Majesty's Ambassador at Vienna respecting the rupture of diplomatic relations with the Austro-Hungarian Government." These Dispatches have been published in separate White Papers.

If any reader should desire to buy copies of the pamphlet for distribution, special terms may be obtained on application to the Publishers.

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# WHY BRITAIN IS AT WAR

## THE CAUSES AND THE ISSUES

It was a reflection of the first of political philosophers that disturbances in States, though they may arise on trifling occasions, do not involve trifling issues. The present world-wide war started from the case of Servia, but involved, even from the start, much larger issues. If only a dispute between Servia and Austria-Hungary had been in question, Britain, as Sir Edward Grey repeatedly stated, would have had no concern in the affair. But since, as we shall see, this dispute was bound to have ulterior consequences, it is necessary to understand what the dispute was about.

### *The Case of Servia*

Servia is a small, but very ancient, kingdom in the Balkan peninsula. It obtained considerable accession of territory as the result of the recent wars in the Balkans, the war between the Balkan States and Turkey, and then the war among the Balkan States themselves. The Servian people are akin, in race and religion, to the Slavs, of which race Russia is

the predominant Power, and to which race also many of the subjects of Austria-Hungary belong. On June 28, 1914, "the crime at Serajevo" was committed, namely, the murder of the heir-apparent to the throne of Austria-Hungary and his consort in the capital of Bosnia. That province, once a part of the ancient Servian kingdom, had fallen into the possession of the Turks; the administration of it had been given to Austria, by the Berlin Treaty after the Russo-Turkish war, in 1878; and in 1908 Austria had annexed it. The Austrian Government alleged (but has not proved) that the crime of Serajevo was a culminating point in a "subversive movement" organised by the Servian Government "with the object of detaching a part of the territories of Austria-Hungary from the Monarchy." On July 23 the Austrian Government addressed an ultimatum to Servia. Austria had been "left a perfectly free hand" by Germany. It was admitted by Sir Edward Grey that "one naturally sympathised with many of the requirements of the ultimatum," and that "the murder of the Archduke and some of the circumstances respecting Servia quoted in the [Austrian] Note aroused sympathy with Austria." Russia also admitted that "the demands were reasonable enough in some cases." But there were two features in the Austrian ultimatum which caused alarm and regret to those who desired to see the peace of Europe maintained. The first was the inclusion of a time-limit, so short (forty-eight hours) as to leave diplomacy little time to avert war. The second was that what Austria demanded within forty-

eight hours was not *a* reply, but *the* reply dictated by Austria. "I had never before seen," said Sir Edward Grey, "one State address to another independent State a document of so formidable a character." The German Foreign Secretary "admitted that the Servian Government could not swallow certain of the Austro-Hungarian demands." Sir Edward Grey advised Servia to go to the furthest possible point in meeting those demands, and similar advice was given to her by France and probably by Russia. The Servian Government replied, within the appointed time, conceding the greater part of the Austrian demands. The conceded demands were of a very stringent character. The Servian reply "involved," said Sir Edward Grey, "the greatest humiliation that he had ever seen a country undergo." Nevertheless, Austria refused to accept the reply, and declared war against Servia (July 28). The part of the Austrian demands which Servia had felt unable to concede touched her very existence as an independent State, and with regard to these matters she offered to submit them to the Hague Tribunal. The fact that Austria, while receiving satisfaction on the other points, had made the refusal of the latter points a *casus belli* raised suspicions of her ultimate intentions. "The real question," said the Russian Foreign Minister, "was whether Austria was to crush Servia and to reduce her to the status of a vassal, or whether she was to leave Servia a free and independent State."

*The Larger Issues Involved*

It had been recognised from the first that the case of Servia could not be isolated. The aggression upon Servia by Austria (with the previous consent of Germany) was bound to involve other Powers.

The German Government did indeed protest to Sir Edward Grey that " the question at issue was one for settlement between Servia and Austria alone " ; but everybody else knew that it could not be so, and the German Government, as we shall see presently, seem to have known this also. The relations between Austria and Russia had already been strained by the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Aggression by Austria upon Servia was certain to be regarded by Russia with the utmost alarm and indignation. During the Balkan crisis the Russian Foreign Minister " had made it clear to the Austrian Government that war with Russia must inevitably follow an Austrian attack on Servia. It was clear that Austrian domination of Servia was as intolerable for Russia as the dependence of the Netherlands on Germany would be to Great Britain." " It must be obvious," said Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons (July 27), " to any person who reflects upon the situation that the moment the dispute ceases to be one between Austria-Hungary and Servia and becomes one in which another Great Power is involved, it can but end in the greatest catastrophe that has ever befallen the Continent of Europe at one blow ; no one can say what would be the limit

of the issues that might be raised by such a conflict." War between Russia and Austria, in a cause wherein Germany had supported the latter, must involve Germany as her ally, and France would be drawn in as the ally of Russia. The action of Austria and Germany in the case of Servia was thus likely to challenge a European war. England and France and Russia saw this. Italy, the ally of Austria and Germany, saw it also. When the general war was breaking out, the Italian Government, being asked to state its intentions, replied: "The war undertaken by Austria, and the consequences which might result, had, in the words of the German Ambassador himself, an aggressive object. Both were therefore in conflict with the purely defensive character of the Triple Alliance, and in such circumstances Italy would remain neutral." "We were fully conscious," said the German Government itself, "that a possible warlike procedure by Austria-Hungary against Servia might bring Russia upon the scene and so involve us in war in accordance with our duties as Allies." "As for Germany," said the German Ambassador at Vienna to the British, "she knew very well what she was about in backing up Austria-Hungary in this matter."

### *Britain's Efforts for Peace*

Foreseeing all this, Sir Edward Grey, whose efforts during the recent Balkan wars had won for him the title of the Peacemaker of Europe, was early in the field with proposals for averting war, and the British Government "persisted to the very last moment of

the last hour in that great and beneficent but unhappily frustrated purpose" (Mr. Asquith).

Already on July 20, having received an inkling of what was on foot, Sir Edward Grey spoke to the German Ambassador of the importance, if the peace of Europe was to be preserved, of Austria "keeping her demand within reasonable limits." The suggestion was not adopted. The German Foreign Secretary "considered it inadvisable that the Austro-Hungarian Government should be approached by the German Government on the matter" (July 22). The Austrian ultimatum, which the same Minister "admitted that the Servian Government could not swallow," was despatched on the following day.

On July 23, having heard from the Austrian Ambassador an outline of what the Austrian note contained, Sir Edward Grey pressed upon him, as also upon the German Government, the desirability of persuading the Austrian Government to extend its time-limit. The Russian Government took the same line. The German Ambassador was instructed to "pass on" Sir Edward Grey's suggestion, but the German Foreign Secretary said that "there would be delay and difficulty in getting time-limit extended," adding, "quite freely, that the Austro-Hungarian Government wished to give the Servians a lesson and meant to take military action."

On July 24, having received the text of the Austrian ultimatum, and foreseeing that if Austria attacked Servia Russia would mobilise, Sir Edward Grey proposed that "Germany, France, Italy, and Great

Britain, who had not direct interests in Servia, should act together for the sake of peace, simultaneously in Vienna and St. Petersburg," " in the event of the relations between Austria and Russia becoming threatening." " It would be very desirable," he said to the German Ambassador, " to get Austria not to precipitate military action and so gain more time. But none of us could influence Austria in this direction unless Germany would propose and participate in such action at Vienna." France was favourable to this plan. So was Italy. Russia was " quite ready to stand aside and leave the question in the hands of England, France, Germany and Italy." Having thus received assurances that, if only Germany agreed, his plan might be efficacious, Sir Edward Grey on July 26 formally invited the Governments of France, Germany and Italy to instruct their several ambassadors to confer with him " for the purpose of discovering an issue which would prevent complications." The invitation was accepted by France and Italy. The German Foreign Secretary " could not fall in with the suggestion, desirous though he was to co-operate for the maintenance of peace " (July 27).

Sir Edward Grey thereupon saw the German Ambassador (July 27) and promised " as long as Germany would work to keep the peace I would keep closely in touch. I repeated that after the Servian reply it was at Vienna that some moderation must be urged." On the following day (July 28) Austria-Hungary declared war on Servia.

As the German Government was understood to

have accepted "in principle" the idea of mediation by the four Powers between Austria and Russia, it was proposed, "that the German Secretary of State should suggest the lines on which this principle should be applied." The German Government made no suggestion of the kind.

Sir Edward Grey's scheme had temporarily been in abeyance, as the Russian Government had offered to discuss matters with the Austrian Government direct. This offer was declined by Austria (July 28).

Sir Edward Grey next appealed to the German Chancellor. "If he can induce Austria to satisfy Russia and to abstain from going so far as to come into collision with her, we shall all join in deep gratitude to his Excellency for having saved the peace of Europe" (July 29). The Italian Government had simultaneously appealed to Germany in a like sense.

On that same day the German Government made certain proposals to Great Britain to which we shall come presently and which the Prime Minister afterwards characterised as "infamous." But so persistent was the British Government in pursuit of peace that Sir Edward Grey in declining the proposals used language of great restraint (July 30), and accompanied his refusal by yet another "most earnest" appeal to the German Chancellor: "The one way of maintaining the good relations between England and Germany is that they should continue to work together to preserve the peace of Europe; if we succeed in this object, the mutual relations of Germany and England will, I believe, be *ipso facto* improved and strengthened. For that object His Majesty's Government will work

in that way with all sincerity and good-will. And I will say this: If the peace of Europe can be preserved, and the present crisis safely passed, my own endeavour will be to promote some arrangement to which Germany could be a party, by which she could be assured that no aggressive or hostile policy would be pursued against her or her allies by France, Russia, and ourselves, jointly or separately."

On the following day (July 31) Sir Edward Grey gave proof of his sincerity and made a further effort for peace. "I said to German Ambassador this morning that if Germany could get any reasonable proposal put forward which made it clear that Germany and Austria were striving to preserve European peace, and that Russia and France would be unreasonable if they rejected it, I would support it at St. Petersburg and Paris, and go the length of saying that if Russia and France would not accept it His Majesty's Government would have nothing more to do with the consequences." In order not to leave this promise in the region of generalities, he threw out a particular suggestion. If Germany would sound Vienna, he would sound St. Petersburg whether it would be possible for the four disinterested Powers to offer to Austria to undertake to see that she obtained full satisfaction for her demands on Servia provided they did not impair Servian sovereignty and the integrity of Servian territory. That Russia was ready to accept such a solution is clear from a peace-formula which her Government had drawn up in concert with Sir Edward Grey. Austria, who on July 28 had refused, had two days later agreed, to discuss matters with Russia.

Everything turned on Germany. Conversations at St. Petersburg and Vienna were proceeding, as the British Ambassador at the latter capital has recorded, when they were cut short by Germany's intervention. On July 31 she sent an ultimatum to Russia.

In the early morning of August 1 (3.30 a.m.), the King of England and his Ministers made a last attempt to secure peace. The King telegraphed a personal message to the Tsar. In this the King first set out the text of a communication from the German Government. The Tsar had previously requested the German Emperor to mediate between Russia and Austria, and had "given most categorical assurances to the Emperor William that Russian troops would not move so long as mediation negotiations continued." The German Government in its communication stated that the Emperor was desirous to mediate and complained that such mediation was frustrated by the Russian mobilisation. King George went on to say that he was "most anxious not to miss any possibility of avoiding the terrible calamity which threatens the whole world"; he appealed to the Tsar to remove any misapprehension which might have occurred; he proffered his good offices "to assist in re-opening the interrupted conversations between the Powers concerned." The Tsar replied on the same day, "I would gladly have accepted your proposals had not the German Ambassador this afternoon presented a note to my Government declaring war."

"In this solemn hour I wish," said the Tsar, "to assure you once more that I have done all in my power to avert war." This assurance is borne out by the

Diplomatic correspondence. It shows, as the Russian Foreign Minister said, that "No suggestion held out to him had been refused. He had accepted the proposal for a Conference of Four, for mediation by Great Britain and Italy, for direct conversation between Austria and Russia; but Germany and Austria-Hungary had either rendered these attempts for peace ineffective by evasive replies or had refused them altogether."

"If war were prevented," the Russian Foreign Secretary had said just before the German ultimatum was received, "it would be largely due to the British Government." The foregoing résumé shows how persistently Sir Edward Grey had worked for peace. What he deliberately abstained from doing, no less than what he did, was governed by a desire for peace. At an early stage in the negotiations, the British Government was urged both by France and by Russia to make an immediate declaration of complete solidarity with them (July 24). The President of the French Republic repeated the request very strongly on July 30. Sir Edward Grey thought that he was more likely to be useful as peace-maker if this country maintained as long as possible an attitude of detachment. Moreover, the Government had no desire to intervene unless the honour and interests of the country made it unavoidable. At the same time intimations were given that it should not be assumed that under all conceivable circumstances England would stand aside.

The official documents thus show how unremitting were the efforts made by Sir Edward Grey to

maintain the peace of Europe and by whom those efforts were frustrated.

They show also how slow the British Government was to commit Britain to any share in the war. That she ultimately became involved was due to causes which had nothing to do with the Balkans.

### *The German Proposal to England*

The decisive day was the 29th of July, 1914. On that day the German Chancellor, who had just returned from the Emperor at Potsdam, sent for Sir E. Goschen, the British Ambassador at Berlin, and had a conversation with him which will always be memorable in history. The Chancellor's words revealed that Germany was preparing to attack France through Belgium, and he proceeded to propose a bargain whereby Germany was to secure the neutrality of England in the impending war. The terms of this proposed bargain were these :—(1) First, England was to stand aside while France was crushed, on the understanding that Germany " aimed at no territorial acquisitions at the expense of France." Sir E. Goschen " questioned his Excellency about the French Colonies, and he said that he was unable to give a similar undertaking in that respect." England was, behind the back of France, to be a consenting party to Germany's acquisition of the French Colonies, should France be defeated in the war. (2) Secondly, England, behind the back of Belgium, was to consent to Germany's violation of the neutrality of that country—a neutrality which both Germany and

England had pledged themselves by treaty to respect. In return Germany gave a promise that " when the war was over, Belgian integrity would be respected if she had not sided against Germany." " The promise was given, be it observed—I am sorry to have to say it, but it must be placed on record—by a Power which was at that very moment announcing its intention to violate its own Treaty obligations and inviting us to do the same " (Mr. Asquith). (3) Lastly, the bargains above described were to form the basis of good relations between England and Germany.

This " infamous proposal " might, said the Prime Minister, " have been thrown aside without consideration and almost without answer " ; but in the interests of peace, as already explained, the British Government answered it in language of restraint: " His Majesty's Government cannot for a moment entertain the Chancellor's proposal that they should bind themselves to neutrality on such terms. What he asks us is, in effect, to stand by while French Colonies are taken and France is beaten so long as Germany does not take French territory as distinct from the Colonies. From the material point of view such a proposal is unacceptable; for France, without further territory in Europe being taken from her, could be so crushed as to lose her position as a Great Power and become subordinate to German policy. Altogether apart from that, it would be a disgrace for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover. The Chancellor also in effect

asks us to bargain away whatever obligation or interest we have as regards the neutrality of Belgium. We could not entertain that bargain either." Sir Edward Grey went on, as already stated, to suggest other terms on which good relations between England and Germany might be secured.

### *How Britain became Involved*

The historic interview between the German Chancellor and the British Ambassador, and the British Government's reply to the Chancellor's proposal, show how Britain was driven to take part in the war by honour, by obligation, and by the interests of self-defence. The case falls under two heads—France and Belgium, with which we will deal in turn. In the case of our relation to France, there was the call of honour and self-interest, but no direct obligation; in that of our relation to Belgium, honour, obligation and self-defence all combined.

### *The Case of France*

In 1904, the Conservative Government concluded an Agreement with France, settling all outstanding questions between her and this country. In 1907, the Liberal Government concluded a similar Agreement with Russia. What is called the "Triple Entente" thus grew up between England, France, and Russia. It was often regarded as a balance against the "Triple Alliance" (Austria, Germany, and Italy). But so far as England was concerned, it was a friendly relationship, not a formal alliance.

Except in the specific matters dealt with by the two Agreements, England was under no obligation to support either France or Russia. In 1906, when Germany was giving trouble to France on account of Morocco, Sir Edward Grey expressed the personal view to the French Government that if war were forced upon France in consequence of the Anglo-French Agreement, public opinion in this country would favour the giving of material as well as diplomatic support. In 1908, when the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria caused an international crisis (Russia protesting against the annexation and Germany "in shining armour" supporting her Austrian ally), Sir Edward Grey told the Russian Government that this being a Balkan affair, in which England had no direct interest or concern, nothing more than diplomatic support would be given by her. Thus each case was left to be decided on its own merits.

What, then, was the case as it existed in the critical days at the end of July and beginning of August? France, having no longer anything to fear from England, had concentrated her fleet in the Mediterranean. Her northern coasts were unprotected. Sir Edward Grey's opinion was, "that if a foreign fleet, engaged in a war which France had not sought and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the unprotected coasts of France," we could not honourably "stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded."

British interests pointed in the same direction. If England had declared her intention of being neutral, France must have withdrawn her fleet from the Mediterranean; and as we do not now keep a fleet there strong enough to deal alone with possible combinations, our trade-routes and inter-Imperial communications through that sea would have been in danger, in the event of sudden complications arising later.

Accordingly, on August 3, Sir Edward Grey was authorised by the Cabinet to give an assurance to France "that if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against French coasts or shipping, the British Fleet will give all the protection in its power."

This was not a declaration of war, but a contingent obligation to make war. The further and final decision was caused by the action of Germany towards Belgium.

### *The Case of Belgium*

Belgium was constituted "an independent and perfectly neutral State" by treaties of 1831-2 and 1839. To those treaties Germany as well as Great Britain was a party. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the Government of Mr. Gladstone proposed a treaty to Prussia and to France, providing that if the armies of either violated the neutrality of Belgium, Great Britain would co-operate with the other for its defence. Both countries assented. To this action "Mr. Gladstone then and always attached high importance." "We do not

think it would be right," he said, " even if it were safe, to announce that we would in any case stand by with folded arms, and see actions done which would amount to a total extinction of public right in Europe." " I do not think we could look on while the sacrifice of freedom and independence was in course of consummation." " There is also this further consideration, the force of which we must all feel most deeply, and that is the common interests against the unmeasured aggrandisement of any Power whatever."

The same question confronted Mr. Asquith's Government in 1914, and they took the same view of it. On July 31, Sir Edward Grey—in view of existing treaties, asked both France and Germany " whether they were prepared to engage to respect neutrality of Belgium as long as no other Power violates it." On the same day he " assumed," in a communication to Belgium, " that the Belgian Government will maintain to the utmost of her power her neutrality." Belgium in reply " expects and desires that other Powers will observe and uphold her neutrality which she intends to maintain to the utmost of her power." France immediately gave Sir Edward Grey the desired assurance. Germany gave no answer.

On August 3 Germany addressed an ultimatum to Belgium saying that she would be treated as an enemy unless she consented to the violation of her territory. Belgium " categorically refused this as a flagrant violation of the law of nations," and the King of the Belgians appealed in the following terms to King George : " Remembering the numerous proofs

of your Majesty's friendship and that of your predecessor, and the friendly attitude of England in 1870 and the proof of friendship you have just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the diplomatic intervention of your Majesty's Government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium."

On August 4 the British Government addressed an ultimatum to Germany saying that unless by midnight she gave a satisfactory reply to the question asked on July 31, "His Majesty's Government feel bound to take all steps in their power to uphold the neutrality of Belgium and the observance of a treaty to which Germany is as much a party as ourselves." Germany gave no reply except by the forcible violation of Belgian territory, and Britain accordingly declared war.

### *What We are Fighting For*

Thus, by an instructive coincidence, a crisis which began by the determination of Austria (backed by Germany) to apply brute force against the independence of a small State in South-eastern Europe came to a head, so far as Britain is concerned, by the determination of Germany (in alliance with Austria) to ride rough-shod over the neutrality of a small State in North-western Europe. "Gentlemen," said the German Chancellor in the Reichstag (August 4), "we are now in a state of necessity, and necessity knows no law. Our troops have occupied Luxembourg, and perhaps are already on Belgian soil. Gentlemen, this is contrary to the dictates of Inter-

national Law. . . . Anybody who is threatened, as we are threatened, and is fighting for his highest possessions, can have only one thought—how he is to hack his way through."

"If I am asked what we are fighting for," said the Prime Minister in the House of Commons (August 6), "I can reply in two sentences. In the first place, to fulfil a solemn international obligation—an obligation which, if it had been entered into between private persons in the ordinary concerns of life, would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law, but of honour, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated. I say, secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle, in these days when material force sometimes seems to be the dominant influence and factor in the development of mankind, that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering Power. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy—and this is one of the greatest history will ever know—with a clearer conscience and stronger conviction that it is fighting, not for aggression, not for the maintenance even of its own selfish interest, but in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world, and with the full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice, but of the obligations which lay upon us to challenge this great issue."

### *The Issues at Stake*

"I ask the House," said Sir Edward Grey (August 3), "from the point of view of British interests, to con-

sider what may be at stake. If France is beaten in a struggle of life and death, beaten to her knees, loses her position as a great Power, becomes subordinate to the will and power of one greater than herself—consequences which I do not anticipate, because I am sure that France has the power to defend herself with all the energy and ability and patriotism which she has shown so often—still if that were to happen, and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland and then Denmark, then would not Mr. Gladstone's words come true ? " —that is to say, would there not be just opposite to us "the unmeasured aggrandisement of a single Power," inimical to the common interest ?

"It may be said, I suppose, that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and, whatever happened in the course of this war, at the end of it intervene with effect to put things right and to adjust them to our own point of view. If in a crisis like this we ran away from those obligations of honour and interest as regards the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether whatever material force we might have at the end it would be of very much value in face of the respect that we should have lost. At the end of this war, whether we have stood aside or whether we have been engaged in it, I do not believe for a moment—even if we had stood aside and remained aside—that we should be in a position, a material position, to use our force decisively to undo what had happened in the course of the war, to prevent the whole of the west of Europe opposite to us, if that had been the result of the war, falling under the domination of a single Power, and I am quite

sure that our moral position would be such——" (The rest of the sentence was lost, says the *Times*, in a loud outburst of cheering.)

### *A Conflict of Ideals.*

The conflict of ideals which is at stake in the war appears very clearly in the conversations between the British Ambassador at Berlin and the German Ministers on the day when war was declared (Aug. 4). The Ambassador asked again if Germany meant to respect the neutrality of Belgium. The Foreign Secretary " at once replied that he was sorry to say that his answer must be No, as, in consequence of the German troops having crossed the frontier that morning, Belgian neutrality had already been violated." The Minister explained that it was " a matter of life or death." The Imperial Government had to " strike some decisive blow as early as possible," and therefore " had to advance into France by the quickest and easiest way." The Ambassador next saw the Imperial Chancellor who held England solely responsible for the war: " just for a word, *neutrality*, a word which in war time had so often been disregarded, just for a scrap of paper Great Britain was going to war." The Ambassador replied that to her it was a matter of life or death to keep her compact. The Chancellor said, " But at what price will that compact have been kept? Has the British Government thought of that"? " I hinted to his Excellency as plainly as I could," writes the British Ambassador, " that fear of the consequences could hardly be regarded as an excuse for breaking solemn engagements."

The German Government, by their deeds in Belgium and by the words above quoted, have plainly avowed their principles: That treaties are "just scraps of paper"; that a pledge to respect a little nation's neutrality is "just a word"; that military expediency knows no law; that a powerful military State is entitled to "hack its way through" a small nation, whose neutrality it had bound itself to respect; that it may pillage and plunder any such nation which presumes to defend itself. In short, that there is no Right, but Might. On the maintenance of the opposite principles, for which Britain stands in this struggle, depends every hope of saving the world from the rule of mere brute force and militarism.

The issues being thus vital to the civilisation of the world, and to the freedom and integrity of Great Britain and of the British Dominions, "let us be sure," as the Prime Minister said, "that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale." And let us bear ourselves through the struggle in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln's War Motto: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right—let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up this nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace."

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